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PERCEIVED SIMILARITY, PERSONALITY AND ATTRACTION TO LARGE ORGANIZATIONS

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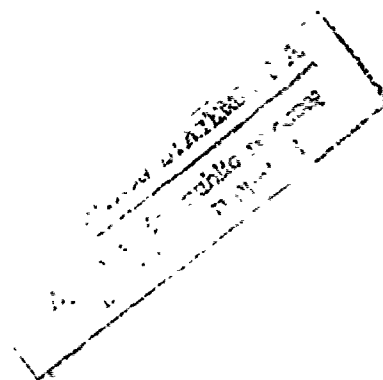# RESEARCH

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13 ABSTRACT

Two separate studies tested the hypothesis that perceived similarity to members of an organization was related to attraction to that organization, but only for relationship-motivated persons, and not for task-motivated persons. Support for the hypothesis was obtained in both studies using Least Preferred Coworker (LPC) scores as measures of relationship- and task-motivation. For high LPC persons only, perceived similarity of personality (study I) and perceived similarity of values and attitudes (study 2) were related to attraction to the organization. The paper seeks to integrate the literature on interpersonal attraction and on job satisfaction, and suggests practical implications of the findings.

14 KEY WORDS	LINK A		LINK B		LINK C	
	ROLE	WT	ROLE	WT	ROLE	WT
Job Satisfaction						
Perceived Similarity						
Personality						
Least Preferred Coworker (LPC)						

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Labor turnover, initiated by the employee, constitutes one of the largest

personnel problems in large organizations. In business and industry, with

the cost of replacing and training a nonsupervisory employee estimated at more

than $2,000, and that of a top manager at $20-30,000, it is not surprising

that the retention of the workforce is one of the most pressing problems on

any personnel director's agenda. Proposed remedies have ranged from exten-

sive pension plans and profit sharing systems to the construction of bowling

alleys and employee saunas. The viability of a volunteer army or navy clearly

depends on its ability to induce officers and men to re-enlist, as does the

life of any organization which must rely on a voluntary work force. Two

studies are here reported which identify some of the factors that determine

an individual's attraction to such an organization, and his intention to

remain in it.

The usual approach in studies of employee satisfaction has been to sur-

vey environmental or organizational characteristics. Typical is Herzberg's

(1966) attempt to identify factors in the work environment which motivate

the individual and those which dissatisfy him, or the Smith, Kendall, & Hulin

(1969) studies of job satisfaction which identify the degree to which the

employee reports satisfaction with his pay, his supervisor, and various as-

pects of his work.

The hypothesis of the present studies is derived from consistent find-

ings that interpersonal attraction is strongly affected by perceived similar-

ity (Berscheid & Walster, 1969). Two important types of similarity have

been related to interpersonal attraction. First, people tend to perceive
greater .imilarity of personality attributes between themselves and those
they like than between themselves and others whom they dislike (Beier, Rossi,
& Garfield, 1961; Broxton, 1963; Fiedler, Warrington, & Blaisdell, 1952;
Miller, Campbell, Twedt, & O'Connell, 1966; Reader & English, 1947). Second,
is the consistent relationship between similarity of attitudes and interper-
sonal attraction (Byrne, 1969; Newcomb, 1961).

A logical hypothesis, then, would be that individuals would be attracted
to an organization to the extent to which they perceived their own person-
ality, values, and attitudes to be similar to members of that organization.
However, an extension of the similarity-attraction research from individuals
to organizations requires one important consideration. We must recognize
that individuals join an organization for a wide variety of reasons, and that
they will elect to remain because the organization continues to satisfy their
needs. An employee's perceived similarity to members of the organization
would be expected to be important to him only if friendships on the job and
a feeling of belonging to the organization were also of importance to him.
If the individual has joined primarily because of such other benefits as high
wages, opportunity for advancement, or technical challenge, perceived simi-
larity to members of the organization is unlikely to affect his attraction
to the organization. Hence, hypotheses based on the similarity-attraction
research are likely to be generalizable to organizations only for individuals
who are strongly motivated to have close interpersonal relations with their
co-workers, and not for those who are motivated primarily by task achievement.

One important measure which identifies motivation to have close inter-
personal relations as against task accomplishment is the Least Preferred

Coworker (LPC) score which has been used extensively in research on leadership (Fiedler, 1967; 1972). The score is obtained bv asking an individual (a) to think of everyone with whom he has ever worked, and (b) to describe the one person with whom he has found it most difficult to work together—this need not be someone with whom he is working at the time. The description of this least preferred coworker is made on a set of 16 to 24 eight-point bipolar adjective scales, e.g.,

$$\text{Friendly} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \underline{\quad} : \text{Unfriendly}$$
$$\quad\quad\quad\quad\; 8 \quad 7 \quad 6 \quad 5 \quad 4 \quad 3 \quad 2 \quad 1$$

The person's LPC score is the sum of the item values, and is interpreted as an index of his motivation structure. Individuals who describe their LPC in relatively positive terms (high LPC) are considered to be motivated primarily by satisfying interpersonal relations. Those who describe their LPC in negative terms (low LPC) are considered to be motivated primarily by successful task accomplishment. Data obtained in recent studies suggested the hypothesis that a relationship-motivated (high LPC) individual's attraction to an organization, as well as his intention to remain in the organization, depend in considerable part on his perceived similarity to important representatives of the organization, while this is irrelevant to a task-motivated (low LPC) person. A series of two studies tested this hypothesis. The first considered the effect of perceived similarity in personality attributes. The second study considered perceived similarity in values and organizational goals.

<center>Study I</center>

<u>Method</u>

The data for this study came from an earlier investigation of army engineer squads (Julian, Bishop, & Fiedler, 1966). This particular analysis used questionnaire responses of 92 enlisted men who were members of various squads.

They had completed a questionnaire which included a set of 12 identical
bipolar adjective scale sheets on which they were asked to describe them-
selves, their least preferred coworker, their squad leader, and various
other members of their organization.

Another part of the questionnaire dealt with their attraction to army
life. In particular, they were asked to indicate the degree to which they
(a) enjoyed being a member of their squad; (b) were interested in making a
career of the army; and (c) were satisfied and content with military life.

Their immediate supervisor, and hence, one of the most salient represen-
tatives of the organization, was the squad leader. For this reason, it
seemed appropriate to identify the degree to which the individual perceived
himself to be similar to the leader of his squad. This perceived similarity
was determined by means of the D statistic, a measure of profile similarity
obtained by calculating the square root of the sum of differences between
corresponding item pairs of the description of self and of squad leader
(Cronbach & Gleser, 1953).

Results

Subjects were divided into three groups on the basis of their LPC scores,
with 32 men classified as high LPC, 28 as medium, and 32 as low LPC. Cor-
relations were obtained between the men's perceived similarity to squad lea-
ders and their attraction to the army. These correlations, obtained separ-
ately for high, medium, and low LPC subjects, are presented in Table 1 (posi-
tive correlations indicate that high perceived similarity correlates with
high attraction). All correlations for high LPC subjects were in the expected
direction and statistically significant, while the correlations for medium
and low LPC subjects ranged between -.11 and .09, and were of course,

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Insert Table 1 about here

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insignificant. These results clearly support the hypothesis that attraction to

the organization is related to perception of similarity to important others

in the organization, but only for relationship-motivated individuals.

Study II

The first study raised several questions about the generality of the find-

ings. First, to what extent were the results specific to a military organiza-

tion and to the perception of one's immediate supervisor? Second, to what ex-

tent did the results depend upon the perceived similarity of personality attri-

butes? The second question is of particular relevance to a more general under-

standing of this problem since similarity of personality attributes may simply

indicate the existence of a personal friendship with the squad leader, and

therefore a relatively momentary attraction to a very small segment of the organ-

ization. The second study attempted to determine whether a perception of simi-

larity on broader philosophical issues would similarly affect an individual's

attraction to an organization. It was also designed to determine whether the

basic hypothesis held in an organizational setting which was quite dissimilar

from that of an army engineer battalion from which the first set of subjects

was drawn.

Method

The subjects were 47 temporary summer employees in the recreation divi-

sion of a large county park department. Most of them were undergraduate col-

lege students majoring in recreation, physical education, or education, and

most had been working with the department for approximately two months at the

5A

Table 1

Correlations with Degree of Perceived Similarity in

Personality between Subject and his Squad Leader

Indices of Attraction to Org.	LPC		
	high (N=32)	medium (N=28)	low (N=32)
Enjoys being a member of his squad	.54**	.01	.09
Interested in making a career of the army	.31*	-.01	-.11
Satisfied and contented with military life	.45**	.06	-.05

*p < .05

**p < .005

time of the study, although a number of these young men and women had been
employed during the previous summer. Their jobs involved the supervision of
playgrounds, beaches, swimming pools and other recreational areas, and none
considered their positions to be permanent or likely to become permanent at
the end of the summer period.

In addition to an LPC scale, all summer employees were asked to complete
a questionnaire on park purposes and park policies which is described in
greater detail below.

Park purposes (goals). A review of the recreation literature (Gordon,
1971) and a series of conferences with park department management produced a
comprehensive list of 15 purposes which parks are generally considered to
serve (e.g., for structured recreation, for preservation of wilderness areas,
to provide the community with a gathering place, and so on). Subjects were
asked to rate the relative importance of each purpose. These ratings reflect
the employees' attitudes or values about important aspects of his summer job.

Park policies. A list of 10 hypothetical policy statements was devel-
oped concerning how parks should be structured and programmed to control and
socialize youngsters while they are in park facilities. Subjects were asked
to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each policy statement.
These hypothetical policy statements reflect important philosophical issues in
the park and recreation field.

Similarity. In order to obtain measures of perceived similarity to mem-
bers of the organization, subjects were asked how closely they thought their
own views on the 15 park purposes and goals reflected the views of park de-
partment management. Unlike the military study, this was not a comparison
between the subject and his immediate supervisor only. Subjects were also

asked how closely they thought their own views on the 10 policy statements
reflected the views of park department management, and the extent to which
they felt they agreed in general with the park department on what the pur-
poses of parks and the department should be.

Attraction. Finally, in order to obtain an index of attraction toward
the organization, subjects were asked to rate (a) the degree to which they
were interested in continuing employment with the department, or in summer
employment with the department at some future time; (b) how interested they
now were in parks and recreation as a career; (c) the extent to which they
felt the summer job experience had been directly applicable to their own
career interests. Confidentiality of subjects' responses was insured by
having questionnaires returned directly to the investigator.

Results

Subjects were divided into high and low LPC groups on the basis of norm-
ative data developed by Posthuma (1970), and the three measures of perceived
similarity were correlated with the indices of attraction to the organization
(Table 2). Of the 47 subjects, five failed to complete all portions of the

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Insert Table 2 about here

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questionnaire and these had to be eliminated from certain analyses. As can
be seen, all nine correlations obtained for relationship-motivated (high LPC)
employees were in the predicted direction, and five of these were statisti-
cally significant. None of the correlations obtained for low LPC employees is
higher in the positive direction than corresponding correlations obtained for
high LPC employees, and four of the nine are in the negative direction. These

Table 2

Correlations between Perceived Similarity between Employee's and

Management's Values and Attitudes and Attraction to the Organization

Area of Perceived Agreement with Management	Interest in Continued Employment		Career Interest in Parks and Recreation		Career Applicability of summer job	
	High LPC[1]	Low LPC[2]	High LPC[1]	Low LPC[2]	High LPC[1]	Low LPC[2]
Park Purposes and Goals	.30	-.12	.15	-.13	.39*[3]	-.24
Park Policies	.47**	.01	.40*	.01	.51**[3]	.26
Purposes of Park Dep't	.39*[3]	.09	.05[3]	-.14	.30[3]	.12

[1] All N's for High LPC = 24 except as noted

[2] All N's for low LPC = 19

[3] N = 23

*p < .05
**p < .01

results provide fairly strong support for the hypotheses of the second study.
Perceived similarity in values and attitudes obviously seems more highly re-
lated to attraction to the organization for the relationship-motivated than
for the task-motivated individual.

Discussion

Two studies were conducted to test the relationship between perceived
similarity and attraction to an organization. Three important points con-
cerning the findings of these investigations bear further examination. The
first of these is the attempt to extend important findings from the inter-
personal attraction literature to the problem of attraction to organizations.
This represents an attempt to integrate two areas in psychology which have
been existing side by side with a minimum of interaction. There is, of course,
no question that organizations consist of people, and it should, therefore, not
be surprising that the processes attracting individuals to organizations should
be similar to those which attract one individual to another. However, the
important point in this study is, of course, that the relationship holds only
for selected individuals, ramely those to whom the organization represents an
arena for establishing and maintaining a secure interpersonal environment.
To the task-motivated individual, to whom the organization represents primarily
a place in which to achieve his task-related goals, interpersonal relationships
are apparently unrelated to the attractiveness which the organizational envi-
ronment provides. Future studies should, no doubt, examine more carefully the
aspects of the organization which are particularly attractive to the task-
motivated individual.

The second point is the obvious relevance of our findings for reducing
labor turnover. While the results of this study present no immediate

algorithms for solving these problems, they do suggest that organizations need to pay attention not only to their work environment, but also to the type of people for whom certain aspects of the work environment will be important, while being unimportant for others. If we were to build an organizational environment which would be particularly attractive to relationship-motivated individuals, it would probably stress informal social spaces, opportunities for interpersonal interactions, and occasions for social get-togethers. Thus, an investment in lounges, coffee rooms, and frequent exchanges with managerial personnel will be most conducive to holding the relationship-motivated employee in the organization, although these should do little if anything to retain the task-motivated employee. Whether an organization will want to concentrate on keeping relationship-motivated employees is, of course, another matter, and as we indicated before, the organizational characteristics which will retain the task-motivated employee are still to be identified.

Finally, these studies provide further support for the interpretation of the Least Preferred Coworker score. A high LPC score has been seen as indicating motivation for close interpersonal relations. The data of these studies confirm the importance which identification or solidarity with important others has to the relationship-motivated person in his dealings with the organization.

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